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**DOCTOR CONVICTED IN FEDERAL COURT
OF NARCOTICS CONSPIRACY**

DAVID N. KELLEY, the United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York, announced that DR. RAFAEL RODRIGUEZ, 49, a medical doctor and Dominican Republic national, was convicted yesterday in federal court of narcotics conspiracy charges after a two-week trial.

According to the evidence, from the early 1990s until September 2003, RAFAEL RODRIGUEZ imported multiple kilograms of heroin into the United States by concealing it in the lining of clothes and shoes which were smuggled into the United States by airline passengers. Once the clothing and shoes arrived in the United States, Rodriguez's co-conspirators in the Bronx removed the heroin from the lining, and then packaged and sold it in the Bronx and New Jersey.

Until August 2003, Rodriguez coordinated the shipments of heroin from his home in the Dominican Republic. In August 2003, Rodriguez came to the United States to personally oversee the heroin distribution organization.

The evidence at trial established that, after his

arrival in the United States in August 2003, Rodriguez was responsible for the importation of two shipments of heroin. The second of those shipments was smuggled into the United States by a courier on September 23, 2003. That courier was arrested by special agents of the Department of Homeland Security, Immigration and Customs Enforcement ("ICE") at Atlanta's International Airport. The agents then arranged to have the courier travel to his intended destination in New York and deliver the clothing to its intended recipients under the agents' supervision. The next day, Rodriguez was captured on videotape entering a room in a hotel near LaGuardia Airport and picking up a pair of shorts and shoes, which together contained approximately 650 grams of heroin.

RODRIGUEZ faces a maximum term of life imprisonment and a mandatory minimum term of 10 years. Sentencing is scheduled for May 2005.

Mr. KELLEY praised the investigative efforts of the Department of Homeland Security.

Assistant United States Attorneys JESSICA A. ROTH and KARL METZNER are in charge of the prosecution.